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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 6226
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3904
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3763
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4470
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4379

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 000179

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [TX](#)
SUBJECT: WAHABIS IN TURKMENISTAN?

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Despite GOTX claims to the contrary, there are credible reports of presence of fundamentalist Islam in Turkmenistan, although the number of adherents currently seems to be fairly small. Using the term "Wahabis" to describe these groups, an Embassy contact recently told PAO about three examples. In all three instances, local security services were quick to arrest suspected fundamentalists. END SUMMARY.

A GOOD EMPLOYEE GONE BAD

¶2. (C) One embassy contact, who is a well-connected mid-level official at the Ministry of Culture, recently told us examples of individuals he knew who were Islamic fundamentalists or about incidents that appear to show the presence of such adherents domestically. One example was of a young, energetic man that worked for our contact at his government office before "disappearing." The contact explained that this young man had begun attending an "underground mosque" that taught a more rigid version of Islam. This young man stopped drinking alcohol and began to criticize other Muslims in his office for adhering to "stupid, wrong, Turkmen traditions." After a few months, in mid 2008, this young man simply stopped coming to the office. When our contact tried to reach him, his family reported that he had been taken by "the services."

PAMPHLETS AND OTHER MATERIAL

¶3. (C) Our contact reported that the "underground mosque" to which the above-mentioned young man had belonged reportedly had been liquidated, but that it was obvious that fundamentalists were still active throughout Turkmenistan. He reported seeing "pamphlets and other material" distributed after Friday services at mosques, and that he had met a few other young men that professed a stricter version of Islam. (NOTE: Most Turkmen follow a more animist version of Islam that fuses many Sufi and other traditions. Even in rural areas, many Turkmen drink alcohol and ignore other Islamic laws. END NOTE.)

DESECRATING A MUSLIM GRAVEYARD

¶4. (C) Our contact also told us the desecration of a cemetery in Balkanat, which he suspected was done by persons who follow a strict version of Islam. The desecration was focused on those grave markers that had faces and photographs etched into the stone, which is a common Russian practice, - something that is anathema under a strict interpretation of Islam. According to our contact, citizens immediately blamed a group of young Wahabis in the region, and the young men quickly disappeared.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: In a country with all the risk factors for the growth of an extremist movement - poverty, poorly educated groups of unemployed and unemployable young men, drug abuse, and little optimism toward the future - it is not surprising to hear that at least a few residents would be attracted to a more fundamentalist form of Islam than that practiced by the majority of Turkmen Muslims. The GOTX clearly understands this risk and devotes considerable intelligence and police resources to preventing fundamentalist influences and swiftly dealing with it, whenever it appears. Given the conservative (meaning a desire to preserve their own culture and traditions) inclination of most Turkmen as well as the predominance of secular culture and the moderate form of Islam that has been practiced for centuries here, it is unlikely that fundamentalist Islam would be attractive to the overwhelming majority of Turkmen Muslims. Nevertheless, since it is impossible to keep out outside influences and given the risk factors present, this is an issue that bears watching. END COMMENT.
CURRAN